



June 2006: Response to Interim Recommendations of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group

Rooted in the Catholic social justice tradition, NETWORK lobbies and organizes for social and economic transformation – including the transformation of our nation's health care. Our faith teaches us that each human being has inherent dignity and worth. Scripture compels us to speak out in solidarity with those most in need and to care for the sick: "For I was sick and you took care of me."¹ Furthermore, our Catholic tradition teaches that access to affordable health care is "an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right."²

NETWORK has worked for many years for universal access to health care. We advocate for a health care system that is accessible and affordable for everyone in the United States and that provides comprehensive, culturally appropriate preventative, primary, acute and long term care.

NETWORK has closely followed the activities of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group and has encouraged our membership to participate in the group's meetings and surveys. We agree strongly with the Working Group's finding that Americans want a comprehensive health care system in which everyone participates. We believe that moral values and principles must guide the creation of a health care system that works for everyone.

We applaud the Working Group's recommendation that the United States government ensure universal access to affordable, appropriate health care by 2012. As a society we share the responsibility to ensure that all people can access high-quality health care, regardless of their health status or their ability to pay. Catholic social tradition teaches us to balance the freedom and good of the individual with the good of society – the common good. Health is a social good, not merely an individual commodity, and access to health care is essential to supporting stronger, healthier communities.

Our faith tradition requires that we care especially for those who are most poor and vulnerable. So we commend the Working Group's commitment to protection against very high health care costs, attention to long-term care for the elderly and chronically ill, and support for community health centers that serve vulnerable populations.

Though many essential details await development, the Working Group's recommendations are an important step towards ensuring health care for all. Meaningful health care reform clearly requires broad social coordination at the national level. Dialogue around health care must continue to include the voices and experiences of ordinary people, as well as the expertise of health care providers. People have a right to participate in the decisions that most impact their lives – especially, in this case, those decisions concerning financing and core health care benefits. Ensuring access to affordable, appropriate care for all people must remain the central aim of this work. We call upon Congress, and any other entities making decisions about health care reform, to hold closely the values of fairness, protection of vulnerable groups and individuals, and commitment to the common good.

¹ Mt. 25: 36

² Faithful Citizenship, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops